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THE 'BEWITCHED' FARM. IN TWO CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—THE MYSTERIOUS DEPREDACTIONS.

If anybody should find the incidents of the following story hard to believe, I shall set the reproach down to the discredit of our modern novelists, who are fast educating the public into a foolish under-rating of reality. They imagine occurrences wonderfully inferior in boldness and spirit to actual events; and still, by the superstition surrounding printer's types, impose them upon dull readers as daring conceptions. The result is, that if one relates a bit of real life, its superiority to fiction becomes a drawback, and actual occurrences are disbelieved because they so exceed the utmost of what the slow wits can imagine. I will endeavour, as far as I honestly can, to keep this astonishing narrative down to the level of ordinary romance, but in the many instances where it may necessarily rise above those limits, the reader ought to make an effort.

Big Tom Treddock was—now, alas, too many years ago—my school-companion; and when we separated at the gates of that institution, it was with a mutual understanding that it was his destiny to enter the army, with view to becoming a field-marshal in an unusually short period of time; but, strange to say, he had, instead, quietly married a second-cousin, and subsequently settled down in one of the eastern counties, at a place called Red Hill Grange, and there betaken himself to practising gentleman-farming on a rather large scale. He had often written me pressing invitations to visit him at his farm; and by way, I suppose, of special temptation, greatly occupied his lively epistles with exciting accounts of the plentifullness of game, which I thought slightly inconsistent with the other descriptions given of heavy crops. But if he had become an enthusiast on the subject of artificial composts, and was recklessly sinking a mint of money in steam-ploughs, I knew he would also retain a liking for seeing a partridge on the wing; so, possibly, there was a chance of getting a shot or two after all. Besides, I was a little curious to

know how Treddock had settled down into married life. I had gone with him, in bygone years, to the dentist's, and learned from his facial contortions what it was to have teeth drawn; when shampooing was first introduced, I had witnessed his heroic resignation in the awful hands of the operator; I had, in a word, profited by his example in a variety of ways, for he was two years my senior; why, then, should I not behold what change the marital state had worked upon him? I wrote, in answer to his last invitation, saying that he might look out for me at the village railway station on the following Thursday, by the 11.25 A.M. train. That letter was sent on the Monday preceding, which, of course, left plenty of time for a line from him in reply. No note, however, came. But I did not attach much importance to that, for I knew that when he asked me to visit him he really meant it; and as he was not at all a formal kind of person, the idea of assenting to any proposed arrangement might never have occurred to him. I also had a slight prior acquaintance with his wife, and I did not think that any difficulty had arisen in that quarter. Thursday morning accordingly found me leaving town in an early train, booked for Red Hill station, indulging a pleasant conviction in my mind, as we whirled along, that Tom Treddock's handsome red face would be about the first sight I should see on the platform. But a second disappointment awaited me, for on alighting at the little country station to which, it seemed, I was the only passenger, I neither found my friend nor any one representing him.

'O yes,' said the dapper station-master, lowering the telegraph signal as the whizzing train again got into motion; 'he knew Mr. Treddock very well. I meant Mr Treddock at the Grange, for they had but one gentleman of that name; and he and all the rest about there wished there were more like him. At least, everybody did but some confounded rascal who had taken a spite against him for nothing; but it was to be hoped it would soon be found out who the villain was.'

I asked for an explanation—what this latter rather mysterious statement meant.

'For the last three or four days,' answered my companion, carefully wrapping up a signal-flag he held in his hand, 'all kind of damage has been done about the farm, and they can't find out who it is does it. They keep a good watch, but it's of no use; somehow, they can't light on the rascal. Very likely,' he added, 'that is the reason Mr Treddock hasn't come down to the station to meet you, if he was expecting you.'

'No doubt, that was the reason,' I said; 'and very sorry I was to hear it; for I felt sure my friend had done nothing to merit treatment of that kind.'

'It was quite the other way,' the station-master replied; and he went on to give Treddock a most eulogistic character as he walked along by my side, kindly insisting on accompanying me past a certain turn in the road, from whence, he said, I could see the stacks belonging to the Grange on the crest of the hill. By and by, they came into view, and I protested against my companion going any further.

'I only hope the ricks won't be fired,' he remarked, pointing in the direction of the white hillocks on the distant ridge; 'that is the dodge which farmers' enemies generally try. It's so easy; just a match struck and put into the straw; and there isn't overmuch water at the Grange. I look for 'em the first thing every morning when I get up,' he said dolefully, taking a fresh stare from under his raised hand in the direction of the stacks.

'Why, there is smoke!' I cried, quite alarmed, as a thin spiral of vapour went up, the light sky behind shewing it plainly.

'That isn't from a stack, bless you. It doesn't go up in a curl like that; it is a cloud and a blaze in a minnit, when the straw is once alight, especially oats. I've seen it twice—once at Dimmock's, and then again at the Firs. That smoke is from one of the house-chimneys, so you'll be sure not to miss the way. I have a luggage-train due at 11.40, or I would have gone on as far as the bridge, because I am sure Mr Treddock would have come down but for some reason.'

I and the gossiping station-master then parted, he assuring me that my luggage should be brought up by the porter the minute that subordinate returned from doing some previous errand; and he added, that he hoped the lad would bring back better news from the Grange. This curious intelligence naturally not a little excited me, and I hurried along the path, which led me through well-cultivated fields for some three-quarters of a mile before I gained the top of the hill where the stacks stood in a cluster, as yet, I could now see, quite intact from the incendiary's torch. The large, red-bricked, many-gabled house then came in sight just below me, and I had merely to cross a yard, skirted by the out-buildings, to gain it.

'Three more are killed, Nell, and the old ewe is one of them. John has just carted 'em up from the bottom meadow.' These were the first ominous words I heard on entering the yard; but angry as were the tones, I recognised in them my old friend's cheery voice.

Turning the angle of a barn, I came upon a little group, the central figure of which was Tom Treddock, broad and burly, looking in his plain homely clothes the very picture of a British agriculturist. At his side stood a rather short, and somewhat stout young lady, whom I instantly identified as

Mrs Ellen Treddock; and around them, in different attitudes of amazement, bent a labouring-man, a boy, and a servant-woman. They were all too intently gazing in one direction, under a kind of cart-shed, to notice me; and as I approached unobserved from behind, I saw that they were, in wondering fascination, contemplating the carcasses of three sheep lying in a row under the shed.

'It's just the same soart o' a blow, reight at the back o' the neck, as t'others got,' said a second labouring-man, whom I now noticed standing beside the dead sheep, occupied just then in roughly wiping his redly-stained fingers among the wool, after examining the carcasses in the region of the head.

'Is more of this villainy going on?' I inquired, nearing the group.

'Is it you? I am ashamed nobody met you!' were good Tom Treddock's first words, griping my hand as in a vice, and smiling oddly through his anger and vexation.

'I am so sorry you find us in this state. You must forgive us, Mr Newcome,' exclaimed his wife, whose eyes I could see were red with crying; and then, dashing away the tears, she gave me a greeting almost as hearty as her husband's, though a hysterical sob diversified it here and there.

'Come along into the house,' interrupted Treddock, seizing my arm.—'Never mind all this now,' he added, glancing at his wife; and then he went on, turning to the servants: 'Go down to the village, and tell the butcher there are three more for him to fetch. That's all. We shall catch the scamp some time.'

'You spoke as if you had heard something about it,' added Mrs Treddock, coming round to me, and recollecting, as it seemed, my first words.

'It isn't worth bothering about, now he is come,' said Tom; 'and you know,' he continued, again grasping my hand, to leave no doubt of the welcome, 'we are very glad to see you, though I was not at the station.'

'But we shall have to tell Mr Newcome all about it, to explain why you didn't write back, and why there was not anybody at the station,' persisted his wife before I could answer.

'That's true. Why, the fact is,' went on Tom, coming to a pause in the middle of the yard, 'we were not expecting you. I know you won't be offended when you understand it. Nelly thought if I didn't write back, you would not start.'

'Yes, but there was a reason for it,' hurriedly put in the lady. 'That sounds, Tom, as if I did not wish for the visit, which you know I did. It was only because things turned out so after you sent your letter; and I thought,' addressing me, 'you would not enjoy yourself as we could wish; and she wound up with a hospitable blush.'

'Just so; there is the point,' said Treddock: 'but we must laugh at it, Nell. We shan't be ruined yet; and my old friend here must think anything that happens is a joke;' and the big, honest fellow pretended to laugh. 'We mustn't be in the blues, old chap, now you are come,' and he slapped me on the shoulder. 'You won't mind going in by the short way, through the kitchen,' he said, making for the back-door.

'I know about it,' I at length got out, in answer to Mrs Treddock's long-ago question, as we entered the house: 'the man at the railway-station told me, so I understood a great deal too well why you were not there to meet me.—Have you had an

accident with the window?' I involuntarily asked, for at the end of the low, old-fashioned passage we had just entered from the kitchen, a large casement was partly hanging inwards, most of the panes in it shivered.

'Oh, it is only one of these jokes that somebody is playing us. It smashed in just after six this morning, before it was well light,' and Treddock sent flying some of the fragments of glass from underfoot with a kick, as he laughed again.

'But is it not shameful, when we have not injured a soul, and would not hurt a hair of anybody's head?' asked his wife, who, womanlike, could not so easily do without sympathy.

'Would not I? Only let me catch somebody and they shall see! I'll have my joke then as they are having theirs now,' and Treddock, to relieve his feelings, knocked open the door of the sitting-room, which we had just reached, with a blow of his big fist.

I learned in the course of the conversation which followed, that these outrageous annoyances began on the evening of the day on which Treddock sent me his last invitation, and they had continued ever since. The first incident was the finding of three or four geese in the yard dead, with their heads wholly or partly severed, as if the necks had been cut by some jagged instrument. On the following afternoon, the fine mastiff dog, kept in a kennel at the end of the house, was discovered lying at the full length of his chain, beaten and bruised to his last gasp. He had been heard some time before to give two or three sharp, whining barks; and in consequence of the affair of the geese, a servant-girl had looked out instantly. The girl did not, it appeared, then give any attention to the kennel; and it was not until some half-hour afterwards that a wagoner observed the poor dog stretched on the ground, moaning and bleeding. The animal had to be shot, to put him out of his misery, and the supposition was, that he received his injuries at the time he was heard to bark. It was to be expected that a second such extraordinary occurrence, following so closely on the heels of the first, should arouse the suspicions of the household; and, in consequence of it, Treddock and a man-servant sat up all that night on the hearth, in anticipation of thieves breaking into the house, my friend reasoning that the getting rid of the watch-dog must indicate an intention of that kind. But no such attempt was made; the gray dawn found all safe, and the master went to his bed. He was, however, awakened, in less than an hour, to receive the unpleasant news, that one of the cows was hopelessly crippled in the home-field, having two of its legs, a fore one and a hind one, both on the same side, broken to splinters. This affair could only be set down along with the other previous inexplicable events, for there was neither hole nor ditch in the croft into which it could have fallen; and, in addition to that, there were bruises on the skin, shewing that the injuries had been inflicted by blows received on the outside. Its recovery was out of the question, and the cow had to be slaughtered. Close search was made for footmarks, or for any other clue, and inquiries were also instituted at the adjoining farms, and down in the village, whether any suspicious characters had been seen about the district. No information pointing to the offender, nor any solution at all of the mystery, was to be obtained.

About noon on the third day, five sheep

were missed from a flock feeding in one of the meadows, and they were at length discovered lying scattered about in a hollow; and in this case, the aid of the butcher was not required, for they had all been killed outright, each one by a blow of some blunt instrument delivered on the back part of the head. Somewhat earlier than this, on the day of my arrival, three more sheep (those I had seen under the shed) had been found in another field, having been treated in exactly the same way; and before that, so early as six o'clock the same morning, the whole household had been startled by the sudden smashing in of the window I had noticed in ruins.

'Isn't it wicked?' asked Mrs Treddock indignantly, as she and Tom finished their joint narrative, the latter once more pretending to laugh the whole affair off. 'We have been as kind to everybody as it is possible to be. Thomas gives the highest wages; Mr Jenkins, who lives at the Firs, says we give too much; and last Christmas I made twelve gallons of excellent soup for the poor villagers. Nearly all the skimmed milk is given away to anybody who comes; and we never turned a beggar back, without either giving them relief, or else putting them to a light job, if they were young and strong.' The good lady finished this statement with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes; nor did I wonder at it, for I had myself grown as angry in listening to the recital, as she was indignant at the actual events.

'A very nice kind of sport you have come down for, old friend, and I hope you'll enjoy it; but we'll try and find some of the other sort as well. They haven't knocked all the hares on the head, nor netted the last of the birds, I hope,' joked Treddock.

'It is not poachers, is it?' I inquired upon this last hint. 'Have you prosecuted anybody for poaching?'

'Not for months, and I wink at it more than anybody else,' was the reply.

'Yes, that makes it so vexing,' interrupted his wife. 'But I really would do as other people do, in future; I would not let anybody off. Though I cannot think it is either of the Baggaleys, and there is but Davis besides them now, and I took his child some preserves myself when it had had the scarletina. We have but those three poachers,' she informed me, shaking her head.

'In a mysterious case like this,' said I, 'one just says whatever comes into one's head, without thinking if it is likely. It can't be any of the family—I mean, any of the servants, or the labourers on the farm, can it?'

The reproachful look I received from each of them, and the simultaneous exclamation: 'O dear, no!' which issued from both, as if the idea of such ingratitude was perfectly incredible, made me feel ashamed of having hinted at the notion.

'Who could it be?' inquired Mrs Treddock; and she was beginning to recapitulate the list of their dependents, with anecdotal instances of the good disposition of each, no doubt for the purpose of satisfying my wicked conscience; but her husband, faithful to his plan of making the least of it, reminded her that she had not yet shewn me the baby. At that mention, she instantly forgot all the disasters, and hurried away to fetch the prodigy; he was their first child, and premier babies are always prodigies.

'It is very queer altogether,' said Treddock in a

hollow whisper to me, as soon as we were left alone, and his face seemed to grow quite pallid as he spoke. 'I don't like to bother you about it, now you are come down for a bit of a run, but I have done all I could to find it out, and I can't hit on a trace. See'—and leaning back in his chair, he elevated his boots, directing attention to the strong soles—we have all got nails driven in in that pattern, the girls as well as the men and the lads, everybody but Nell. I had the village shoemaker up on purpose the day before yesterday.'

'In order to know the footprints of those belonging to the farm from others?' I asked, for I saw that rows of superfluous nails were arranged in a kind of diamond pattern.

'Yes, but I can't find a single footprint; it is that which staggers me. But Nell is coming back,' he said, as the maternal voice made itself heard in the distance, talking to baby in the customary crowing dialect. 'Don't say anything before her. I try to make nothing of it when we are talking, but I wish she and the child were at her mother's. I should not care much what came then; it would find me a match for it.' Big Tom Treddock, I knew, was no coward, but the good soul was afraid of some mysterious disaster involving his wife and the baby.

'I am very glad I am come down, Tom,' I hastily answered, 'since it is just possible I may help you. Two heads, they say, are better than one; and I shall like the sport of hunting out this villain better than even shooting partridges.'

'Thank you, old fellow,' murmured Treddock, with flashing eyes, leaning across the hearth, and shaking my hand. 'But let it drop now: she is here.'

Mrs Treddock had clean forgotten all annoyances in gazing into baby's blue eyes; and scarcely the renewed sounds of crashing windows, or the sobs of further expiring sheep, would at that moment have distracted her attention. Master Charlie Treddock, I may freely say, even allowing something for the prejudice of my friendship for his parents, was a charming little fellow for his time of life, and I thought his father was not without some justification for wishing him out of the possibility of harm's reach. The young gentleman was pleased to strike up a friendship for me forthwith, and the occasion was rendered memorable for the remainder of his mother's existence, by his giving a clutch at my beard, and uttering a sound to me unintelligible, but which the good lady confidently asserted was: 'How do?' She was quite overcome by the circumstance, for he had not articulated to that extent before; and as not even his sire seemed to be sufficiently impressed with the wonder of the thing, she hurried away again in great excitement to communicate it to the female domestics, among whom a triumphant chuckling, as we could hear from a great distance, was at once set up. All troubles were lost sight of in this glorious achievement, and I myself began to take a vague pride in the affair, for it was a kind of joint transaction between baby and me. Mrs Treddock became quite gay, Tom grew almost cheerful, and the conversation entirely changed in its character.

They dine very early in the country, even gentlemen-farmers. One o'clock was the hour at Red Hill Grange, and our chat soon brought us to that time. Mrs Treddock lost a little of her spirits on

the serving of the meal, lamenting that she had not known I was coming, and making more apologies for the absence of dainties than the well-furnished board rendered necessary. But the journey had given me a famous appetite, and, possibly influenced by my feats as a trenchederman, she lost this new trouble by and by, and the meal passed very pleasantly. A bottle of specially old port was subsequently produced, in honour of my visit, and we had just broken the seal and drawn the cork, when a shrill scream was heard in the direction of the kitchen, instantly succeeded by a great hubbub of female voices. We stared blankly into each other's faces.

'There's something else!' shouted Treddock, flinging the corkscrew upon the table with a bang, and starting up in his chair as the door of the room opened.

'Please, Tom Jackson says as he's found the owd hayrick just pushed o'er,' said a wide-eyed dairymaid, mechanically wiping the curd off her arms with her apron.

'The yard isn't a-fire?' demanded Treddock in a roar, hurrying across the room.

'I dunno,' was the doubtful answer.

'Lord save us! What is to be done?' moaned Mrs Treddock, as she and I followed her husband, who dashed past the girl, and made for the back premises.

But the stack-yard was not on fire, nor did it present any very alarming appearance. Tom Jackson, a white-haired urchin, was pointing rather theatrically to a kind of skeleton of a hayrick, which lay on the ground instead of standing upright, and vociferating to his master that it was not in that condition an hour before, when he went away to dinner. Treddock carefully examined the fallen hay, but did not make many remarks; and his wife, who seemed much relieved to find that this was the extent of the disaster, went back again into the house. The remains of the rick, judging from its appearance as it lay, must, when standing upright, have had the look of one corner of a dilapidated house left behind in some dismantling process; and its tumble suggested nothing alarming to me, for I should have fancied that a puff of wind would have sent it over at any time.

'Wet the stacks again,' was Treddock's evasive remark, in reply to an observation from me to that effect, addressing the order to the lad, who instantly fetched from somewhere in the vicinity the nozzle-end of a gutta-percha pipe, and turning a cock, began to throw water on the oat and wheat stacks. 'It will be sure to injure them,' my friend went on, turning to me; 'but there is no knowing now what may happen, and so once every hour I have them damped. They wouldn't burn so quickly. Go round to the other side; and if you leave the yard again before somebody else comes in, I'll settle with you,' he said to young Jackson; whereupon that youth instantly hobbled out of sight and hearing.

'It can't have been the wind, for there isn't enough to blow a handful of chaff away; and, besides, it comes from the wrong side,' remarked Treddock, in answer to my previous observation. 'The rick has gone over that way,' he added, and then he put up his open hand to indicate that the soft wind only just breathing blew from the exactly opposite quarter. I saw at once that I was mistaken in my off-hand guess. 'Nor it isn't the props that have given way—the biggest is still

standing, and the others have gone with the rick—see ;' and he pointed from one to another of some pieces of wood which had supported the hayrick. ' It has been pushed over,' he oracularly concluded, in the previous hollow whisper ; and then he began looking carefully about on the ground, which I now noticed was covered with a white dust.

' Has it done much harm ? ' I asked, for he seemed to be very serious about the matter.

' No, this isn't much ; but it is one more affair like all the rest. That footprint is yours, I know, though it hasn't got a diamond. Just put your foot down in a fresh place. Those marks are mine, and these are the lad's. Nell's slippers only came there,' he continued, rapidly glancing about the enclosure. ' Ah,' he said with a half-vexed sigh, as I made a fresh impression of my foot on the white dust, ' I knew it was your mark. It is that that puzzles me most ;' and he thrust his hands into his hair till it stood up all ways, in sign of his perplexity. ' How could anybody come to the rick and go away again, without leaving footprints ? '

This was a question I could not answer. I could only examine the ground for myself, and shake my head dumbly.

' It is lime,' Treddock said, kicking the white dust ; ' and you can see it shews everything. Those little scratches are marks where the hens have been ; and that horseshoe print is from Nell's new mare's feet. I have used two or three bushels of it, and had it scattered about the gates leading into the fields and everywhere ; but there isn't the trace of a footprint beside our own. How can that be ? That is the thing I want to know,' he repeated, with just a little expression of scare on his face. ' If it was only noises, I should think the place was haunted—I should, upon my word ; though you must not mention that to Nell ;' and he laid his broad hand on my arm. ' But ghosts don't kill sheep with blows, nor beat dogs to death.'

' No, it isn't a ghost which has pushed the rick over, if it has been upset,' I said as cheerfully as I could ; for the mystery of the affair, I confess, was beginning to have a little effect upon me. ' But you have not shewn me over the place yet,' I added, trying to be brisk.

' We'll look at it now,' he rather lugubriously answered, walking away. We, however, wanted our hats, which had been forgotten in the previous hurry ; and going first into the house to procure them, Treddock apprised his wife of what we were intending, and then we set out to survey the farm.

It was a large holding, and everything appeared to be done in a severely scientific manner, and upon a proper scale. Treddock again partly recovered his spirits in pointing out to me, with pride, how clean the hedge-bottoms were ; the irrigating contrivances he employed for making the most of their rather scanty supply of water ; how free the grasses were from burdock and colt's-foot ; and went on to talk most learnedly of subsoil drainage, deep-ploughing, chemical manures, the rotation of crops, and the stall-feeding of stock. It was only at the entrance of the fields, where around every gate, both within and without, had been plentifully dusted the white lime, that he grew solemn ; and there he never failed to shew me that no trace of a footprint prior to mine could be found which did not leave the mark of nails arranged in a diamond. Treddock seemed as badly perplexed from the want of a footprint as did Robinson Crusoe with

the one he got. We came, here and there, upon the farm-labourers, busily at work ; but Treddock told me they were stationed where they could watch as well as labour ; and that it was scarcely possible for any one to approach the house from any quarter without being seen by some of them. I learned that I had myself been observed, and, as I was led to infer, not without a little suspicion, when I arrived in the forenoon. Negative answers were invariably given to my friend's inquiries ; no strange persons had been seen about the place. The workmen looked like jolly fellows, not of the sort to indulge in malice of this kind, and the terms they appeared to be on with their master seemed very satisfactory ; while, to judge from their manner when alluding to the sheep found dead that morning, they felt equally indignant with himself at this style of doings ; and any offender who fell into their hands was not unlikely, according to some of their remarks, to receive rough treatment.

Treddock shewed me the field in which the animals had been killed ; and certainly it was difficult to see how any miscreant could have escaped being seen either in approaching or in retiring, even if not caught in the act, for men were at work all around the meadow ; and the fences there, as all over the farm, were kept very low. Really, it was most mysterious, and I could not help my thoughts now and then suggesting that the enemy must be among the men themselves, however innocent they all looked, but I did not mention that idea again to Treddock. As we rambled about, Tom shewing me where he was lightening this soil by burning it, and making that stiffer by ploughing clay in with it, we occasionally startled a covey of plump partridge, and once or twice a hare dashed away from our side. We also came upon a few rabbits, which my companion treated with great disrespect, declaring they were the pest of a farmer's life, promising them traps, ferrets, diggings-out, shootings, and I know not what. The prospects of sport were altogether decidedly better than I had anticipated, if it had not been for the perturbing affair of these malicious depredations, which put thoughts of mere pleasure out of the question. But for all that, Treddock persisted in saying I should ride with him to the meet of the hounds the next morning, which, it appeared, was fixed to take place not very far distant. I was but a light-weight, he said, and his wife's new mare, a recent purchase, on which I could see he plumed himself much, would carry me nicely. I answered that we must see how matters went on betwixt that and morning, for I should not be satisfied if I did not in some way help in finding out the puzzle of these queer doings. He was not going to have all the pleasure of my visit spoiled in that way, he vowed ; and if Nell and the child were away, he would not care much, for he had not done badly the last year, and the rascals, whoever they were, could not easily ruin him.

' They want me back at the house,' he rather nervously said, looking intently in the direction of the farmstead, as we finally emerged from a little plantation into which he had taken me to shew me a small preserve of pheasants he was raising by hand-feeding. ' The flag, as I call it, is out of the window. When I am out in the fields, and am wanted, that is the signal ;' and, as he spoke, he quickened his pace. A white streamer of some

kind (perhaps the half of the window-curtains) was visible floating outside a casement in an upper gable of the Grange.

'Nothing fresh is amiss, I hope?' I could not resist saying.

'No, I think not, or else they were to let a gun off,' he answered, taking huge strides across the broken soil. 'But Nell is such a good creature, and she would not like to frighten us for a little thing,' he added, breaking into a trot, in trying to keep up with which I nearly dislocated my ankles.

HORSE-FLESH.

SEVERAL circumstances have lately combined to call public attention to the horse and his surroundings. The sales by auction of the stocks of Lord Henry Bentinck and of the late Mr Anderson, and the enormous prices bid at those sales for really first-class hunters and roadsters, must be fresh in the recollection of all who take even a passing interest in the subject. The unprecedented sums paid down, not for race-horses, be it observed, but for weight-carriers, and even for ladies' hacks, led many people to conclude that the breeding and rearing of horses must be a very profitable trade. On the other hand, it is asserted that the horses in question were exceptional animals, collected by the exercise of much skill, judgment, and perseverance, in one case by a private individual, in the other by a first-class dealer. The business of the breeder is said really to be highly speculative, and that, without a slice of luck, it can hardly be made to shew a profit, considering the deductions that have to be made for interest on a large capital, payment of a skilled staff, and allowance of a long margin between the dealer's buying and selling prices.

While these questions were to the fore, a totally distinct set of circumstances, namely, the success of French horses on the English turf, further contributed to make us look to our studs and stables. On this side of the Channel, we have long been in the habit of fancying that we know how to train a race-horse better than anybody else. But having invited the world to compete with us, our friendly challenge has been responded to with a result that we little anticipated. Our most coveted racing prizes have been wrested from us on our own soil.

Three principal reasons have been assigned in explanation of this phenomenon. It is said, *firstly*, that for years past, the French have been buying up and exporting our best blood—that is, horse-blood—regardless of expense, and that these so-called French horses are English horses after all. *Secondly*, that the French climate is better suited than our own for training purposes, the sudden checks and chills so common here being unknown across the water. And *thirdly*, owing to the imperfect machinery for registering the age of horses born in France, French-bred horses, said to be of the same age as our own, are suspected of being several months older.

Some good judges see nothing in the present French supremacy which requires explanation. They say, that if a certain number of French horses run in all our principal races, it is to be expected that the foreigners will occasionally win. Nevertheless, it seems to most that the French success has lately been too constant to be wholly accounted for by this appeal to the doctrine of probability.

The question of climate leads us naturally to inquire: What is the native country of the horse? The popular belief is, that the horse is a native of Arabia; and the best procurable evidence tends no doubt to shew that the horse came to us from that country, or rather that our most esteemed blood-horses are of Arab descent. The Darley Arabian, the Byerly Turk, and the Godolphin Barb (the last two most probably Arabs), together with the four royal mares (Arabs) imported by Charles II., are the admitted progenitors of nearly all our swiftest and most enduring steeds. But even if it were determined beyond dispute that all our most valued sires and mares were obtained from Arabia, it by no means follows that the equine race is indigenous to that country. Some writers regard Egypt as the native country of the horse, grounding their view on the fact, that the horse is mentioned in the Scriptures as having been domesticated in Egypt at a very remote period. But Egypt is not adapted to support the horse in a wild state. At one season of the year, the vegetation almost disappears under the burning influence of the tropical sun; at another, the inundations of the Nile render large tracts of the country uninhabitable. Owing to these causes, the wild animal would probably seek some less changeable region. Humboldt looks upon the steppes of Crim-Tartary as the fatherland of the horse, since wild races have abounded there from time immemorial. The inference seems to be, that the East was the cradle of the equine species; but the place of its original abode cannot, with our present evidence, be more precisely fixed.

The horse is still to be found in a ferine state on the steppes of Crim-Tartary, and on the extensive savannahs of both Americas. The ancestors of the latter race were originally introduced into South America by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, and they are said still to shew marks of resemblance to the Spanish breed from which they have descended. The wild horses of Venezuela wander about in large bodies, and present a magnificent spectacle, especially when alarmed by the appearance of travellers. They gallop round and round the intruders in compact masses of many thousands, apparently with the object of reconnoitring, advancing to within a few yards, when they halt, and evince astonishment and displeasure. It is asserted that if a herd happens to fall in with a single traveller, they will form a circle, and prance upon him. They may, however, be dispersed by firing off a gun.

Horses absolutely wild no longer exist in Europe, though not many years ago they were still to be met with in Hungary. But the horse is still presented to us in a state bordering on freedom in the extensive steppes which stretch from the banks of the Danube, across the whole of Russia in Europe, and in Asia, and terminate in the heart of Mongolia. Over this vast tract of country are spread immense breeding-studs or *taboos*. A taboo consists of about a thousand head of cattle, several hundred horses, several hundred brood-mares, and some fifteen or twenty stallions. These latter regard themselves as the lords of the community; they fight desperate battles among themselves for the mere honour, as it were, of the championship, till at last one, by the rule of his hoof, establishes himself as the conqueror. The most tremendous battles are fought, however, when two taboos happen to meet. The mares

and foals keep aloof, but their furious lords rush to the fight with an impetuosity of which those who only know the horse in a domesticated state can form no conception. The enraged animals lash their tails and erect their manes ; they fasten on each other with their teeth, screaming and howling the whole time, and they rattle their hoofs against their foes with such violence that the noise can be heard a long way off. The victors carry away a number of captive mares in triumph.

The taboon is not unfrequently attacked by wolves. At such times, the herd will often shew such determination and violence in charging the wolves as to put them to flight. The wolves, however, return after a time, and hover about. Perhaps some unlucky foal straggles a few yards from the main body, when it is instantly pounced upon. Should the mother attempt to rescue it, she is seized. This is the signal for a grand mêlée. The mares form a circle, within which the foals take shelter ; while the horses form themselves into a solid phalanx, and charge the wolves, trampling on them, and tearing them with the teeth. The stallions do not take part in the charge, but gallop about, as though directing the movements of the others. They also cut off the retreat of the disorganized wolves, rushing furiously at any single one they see, tearing him with their teeth, or stunning him with their hoofs. They then throw the body to the mares, who trample upon it. If the stallion misses his aim, he is immediately fastened on by the hungry wolves, dragged to the ground, and torn to death.

It may be observed, as bearing on the question of the native country of the horse, that he can withstand a wider range of temperature than any other animal, save and except the companion of man—the dog. This fact is the more remarkable when considered in contrast to the restricted area within which other beasts of burden, such as the camel and the reindeer, are capable, owing to their physical formation, of exerting themselves usefully. The camel, for example, can only traverse a sandy soil. On wet or slippery land, he cannot proceed without stumbling ; and he is quite useless in hilly countries. He seems to have been specially made for the desert. His thick hoof conducts heat but slowly, and so protects his feet from the effect of the burning sand. He can close his nostrils at pleasure, and so exclude particles of sand. And as everybody is aware, he can fast for a long period without inconvenience. The hump, consisting almost entirely of fat, may be described as a portable reservoir of food. When obliged to fast, the hump gradually diminishes in size, being absorbed to supply the system with nutriment. The bag of the stomach is provided with capacious cells for the retention of water, and these being once filled before starting on a journey, the animal requires no more liquid for a considerable period.

The reindeer, again, is especially formed for progression in snowy countries. His hoofs are deeply cleft, so as to expand widely on pressure. They thus form a kind of natural snow-shoe, which prevents the animal from sinking into the snow. The reindeer is furnished with a semi-transparent nictitating membrane, which he can project over the eyes at will. During the continuance of the most blinding snow-storm, he can, by means of this membrane, protect his eyes from injury, and yet see sufficiently to preserve himself from danger.

The hoof of the horse in a state of nature is only adapted to a grassy surface ; here the natural wear and tear of the hoof is just compensated for by its growth. On hard roads, the unprotected horn would soon be worn away, the vascular part of the foot would be exposed, and the horse would fall lame. The first attempts towards rendering the horse useful on hard ground were directed to hardening and solidifying the hoof. We read in Xenophon that the feet of horses should be kept free from moisture, that their hardness may not be impaired. Several applications in the form of ointments and lotions were used with the intention of toughening the hoof, but without much avail. In large cities, the roads were paved with broad flat stones, so as to diminish as much as possible the wearing away of the horny substance of the foot. The pavements of the celebrated Via Appia and of the Via Aemilia were constructed with this object.

The first step towards shoeing the horse was the contrivance of *soleæ*, or sandals, made to clasp on the hoof like the hunting-sandal now in use on emergency. In Japan, sandals of plaited straw are still used, fastened round the fetlock with straw bands. They are soon worn out, but costing little, are easily replaced.

Some nations, the Icelanders, for example, have used horn to shoe their horses. A portion of a ram's horn was formed into suitable shape, and fixed on the hoof with horn pins. A similar practice is said still to obtain in the valley of the Oxus, the material there employed being the antlers of the mountain-deer.

The grand discovery of iron horseshoes took place, it is believed, about the time of the Norman Conquest. It is not known positively when or by whom iron horseshoes were invented. In the Bayeux tapestry, worked by the ladies of Queen Matilda's court, to celebrate the victories of William the Conqueror, the feet of the horses are represented without shoes, but the bits, spurs, and other trappings are minutely rendered. In the Great Seal of William the First, the horse is unshod, but in the seals of subsequent kings, all the horses have shoes. The name of Henry de Ferres or de Ferrers is said to be derived from the Latin *ferrum*, iron, in reference to the iron horseshoe. The story goes that Henry de Ferres, who came over with the Conqueror, received his name from being appointed to inspect the *ferriers* (*ferrarii*). The descendants of this De Ferres, the present Ferrers family, bear in their arms six horseshoes, in token of the position held by their ancestor. After the time of the Norman Conquest, the practice of shoeing horses with iron spread gradually, till it prevailed over the whole of the civilised world.

It was stated in an early part of this paper that certain French horses are suspected of being older than they are represented to be. In this country, horses take their age from the first of January ; that is to say, a horse foaled in December is reckoned a year older than one foaled in January. Some people think that French horses foaled, say in October, have been passed off as foaled in January, and so brought within our regulations to entitle them to run with horses three months younger than themselves. Be this as it may, there is no certain test of the exact age of a horse to within three months. It is true, that up to a certain period the age of the horse can be told, as every one knows, by inspecting his teeth. But this

process, which seems so mysterious to the uninitiated, only enables us to tell the age approximately, not exactly, as will appear on explaining the *modus operandi*.

When the incisor or cutting teeth of the horse (called in man the front teeth) first protrude through the gum, their top face is not smooth, the edges are elevated, and the centre depressed. This depression in the cutting surface is called the *fossula*. The fossula is not subjected to friction during mastication, owing to the elevation of the edges of the tooth. The fossula therefore soon becomes black, and the black spot thus left is called the 'mark.' In time, the elevated rim of enamel wears down, the cutting surface of the tooth becomes flat, and, as a consequence, the whole surface is exposed to attrition, and the mark disappears. The time occupied in wearing away the mark is pretty uniform—about three years. Now, since we know about the age at which the teeth are put up, and about the time that the mark remains, we can calculate about the age of the horse, so long as any 'marks' are left. At the age of three, the second set, or permanent teeth, are put up in the centre; and after this, one pair of permanent teeth appears every year, till the age of five. The central pair of incisors consequently loses its mark on the attainment of the sixth year; and the pairs which appear in the fourth and fifth years, lose their mark in the seventh and eighth. After the eighth year, there is no accurate means of estimating the age of the horse; therefore, all horses over eight years are technically termed 'aged'—aged, that is, not as regards the decline of the vital energies, but simply as regards the wearing out of their marks. Horses of at least twenty years old, able to perform moderate work, are often met with where the least humanity has been bestowed on their management. Eclipse died at the age of twenty-five, Flying Childers at twenty-six. Burns's mare, Maggie, attained more than twenty-nine years:

"Tis now some nine-and-twenty year
Sin thou was my guid father's meere.

Bucephalus, the celebrated horse of Alexander of Macedon, is said to have lived to thirty. Pliny remarks that many horses attain the age of fifty. The natural term of the horse's existence is probably from about twenty-five to thirty years. At this rate, horses of thirty-five years of age would be about as common as men of ninety. The horse is, however, too often rendered prematurely decrepit, owing to ill-treatment, overwork, and the unnatural habits of the domesticated state.

THE CLYFFARDS OF CLYFFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'LOST SIR MASSINGERED,' &c.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE HEIR'S SECRET.

RUPERT entered 'the Cathedral' running, although necessarily at a stoop, by reason of the lowness of the adit, and casting one hasty glance at Mildred, began, without speaking, to search the vast apartment torch in hand. There was the same restless expression in his eyes, which had struck a momentary terror in the girl that very morning, combined with a passion such as she had never seen in him before. But she was not frightened now. What fear was in her was for Raymond; was he safe in

the spacious gloom of Finis Hall? or was the relentless stream carrying his beloved form, inanimate, bruised, disfigured, into the recesses of the hill? For the moment, she intensely hated his brother, who had thus driven him to take so perilous a step; and perfect hate, like love, casteth out fear. Moreover, fully convinced that in concert with her wily aunt, Rupert had basely tricked her in their previous conversation, she was inclined to imagine that he was still playing a part. Although, therefore, he ran to and fro about the chamber in a strange wild way, and muttered to himself in anger, she stood firm, watching him in contemptuous silence, and when he came close to her, having thoroughly explored the place, and menacingly shaking his torch in her very face, exclaimed: 'Where is he? Where is he hiding his false face?' she returned his eager look with one of scorn.

'Who is it you seek?' said she. 'Whose face is it that Rupert Clyffard ventures to call "false"?' He who in league with a heartless woman plotted against an unprotected girl, to steal her heart with lies. Nay, you waste your fierce looks upon me, sir; I am not your vassal; your gentle blood I hold as nothing without gentle deeds. Why do you track me hither, and force your company upon me when I need it not; nay, more, sir, when I loathe it?'

He looked at her with suspicious cunning, and uttered but a single word—'Raymond?'

'He is not here,' returned she coldly. 'You have seen for yourself, have you not?'

Like one upon whom conviction is forced against his will, Rupert answered peevishly: 'And yet she told me he was here.'

'Have you never known her tell a falsehood?' returned Mildred disdainfully. 'When you dropped your kerchief in the meat to-day—'

'Ay,' interrupted Rupert simply, and passing his hand across his forehead, 'I remember that. That was the signal we agreed upon—your aunt and I—so soon as you had given your promise to be mine, I was to drop the kerchief; sweet Mildred—and you gave it.'

'I, Rupert? Never! No, and I never will! How dare you tell me to my face I did! I do confess you fooled me with your dishonest, artful talk of "Save my Reason," so that I threw away some pity; but my love, sir—be sure of this—will never be so wasted!'

"Dishonest—artful—talk," repeated Rupert slowly. 'Do you think I made a mock of being mad?'

'I do; and that Aunt Grace set you on to do it.'

'She? Why, Mildred, think a little: would she not lock me up as she did Uncle Cyril, so that, after murdering Raymond, all would be hers? No; she must never know what you shall know, love, and that now. Nobody must know, Mildred—promise me that much, sweet heart: but Mistress Clyffard and that Clement—he with the cruel eyes—those must know least of all. Sit you down here, and listen to me a little.'

He pointed to two slabs of glittering spar, like thrones of frosted silver; and she sat down on one, and he upon the other, close beside her. She obeyed him involuntarily; but if she had given herself time to think, she would have obeyed him still; the same idea had now seized upon her respecting Rupert's sanity as had taken possession

of her before ; she acquitted him of having previously deceived her ; and once more, though her heart was by no means free from fear, it had room for tenderest pity. But what made her more compliant than all was this, that while he last was speaking, she had heard a certain far-off sound which convinced her of the safety of her lover. The swooning note of an *Aolian* harp could not have been fainter ; but she knew that signal well, and her attentive ear had drunk it in—the sweetest music it had ever listened to—while Rupert, rapt in earnest speech, had not observed it.

'I will listen to you, Rupert,' said she kindly ; 'but speak like your honest self, and not what another has bidden you to say.'

'Mildred,' commenced the young man slowly and sorrowfully, 'I had hoped that what passed this morning between us two, would have spared me the confession I have now to make. I think it must have done so, had you loved me. You would then have credited what I said, and have known that there was more—and worse to say. The dark cloud that I told you seemed about to fall upon my being—soul, heart, and brain—has fallen already. It is not even in *your* power to avert it ; but you may lift it up, Mildred. I am prison-bound, but you have the master-key—you have indeed—that can undo my fetters, and set wide the door. Shake not your beauteous head, but look upon me tenderly—ay, so, and listen to my woe, if not my love. Dear Mildred, I am Mad. Start not, nor tremble, sweet heart ; I am not so mad, nor ever shall be, that I should injure *you*. Not one shining hair but being yours is sacred to me as sacramental wafer to the priest ; and as he worships it, and treats it reverently, so that all men should bow before it likewise, so do I worship you. Nay, you need not grudge me that poor favour, girl ; it can harm you not, and I worship nothing else—not I, i' faith. I am like Guy in that—I love not chappel-going. While the priest is droning, droning, my fingers itch to strangle his fair throat ; all chanting-time, I sing my maddest songs ; and when they kneel, I plant my face in the soft cushions, and make mocking mouths. Do not look so, Mildred ; I can bear the pity of your eyes, but not the terror. It was for fear of this that I did not tell you all long, long ago, and only hinted at the horrid thing this morning. You believe me *now*, girl ; that is well. I feared that I should have to laugh out loud ; then nobody could doubt.

'I was not born a mad child. There was no band about my forehead, tight and hard as now, when I was very young ; but gradually the thing has stolen on me, day by day, or rather night by night, as I should reckon, for it is at night, like a baleful flower, that madness grows. Ah ! what nights I passed. Alone in the large bedchamber above the hall I used to lie—a ghastly nursery, Mildred, for a child like me. The woman that was my nurse, instead of tales of fairies and magicians, told me of Guy and of that dread shape—the statue yonder—which I had seen a thousand times before I beheld it here. Every night she promised to sit beside me to keep off the dreadful things, and every night she would put the candle to my face, and seeing me, as she thought, asleep, would leave me in the dark : then came the whispering voices, the soft rustling sounds, the stealthy footsteps round my little bed. Ah ! what misery, Mildred, from the time of closing doors and loud good-nights, when my father and the rest retired, until the blessed morning dawn !

Above my room was one which no one occupied, as it was thought ; but I knew better. All night, one gibbered and moaned there, warming himself in the moonbeams as best he could, and shaking his chain for company. Once in the daytime I ventured thither, and though he was not there, I saw his chain fastened to the wall by a strong staple, as madmen always are by their sane brethren. This made me very cunning from the first. Only my father knew, and what he knew I think he has now forgotten. On a day when I thought myself unwatched, I had climbed up the winding stair of the West Tower—a weary way for my young limbs to go—and peering above the battlement, was about to execute a plan, long and fondly cherished, of leaping off into the air, when a strong arm was suddenly put around my waist, and I heard my father's voice. He was not angry, as I feared he might be ; he spoke me fair and very kindly, and carried me down stairs to save my little limbs ; and while he did so, upon my face I felt his burning tears fall fast, which frightened me, not knowing why he wept. But I know now—'

'Alas ! poor child,' murmured Mildred tenderly. 'My heart bleeds for thee, Rupert.'

'She pities me, and does not fear !' he cried. 'There is hope yet then. The red-hot pain already hurts less keenly. I thank thee, blessed balm. Mildred, I have told you that the night is terrible to such as I am ; but the morn is very sweet. My comfort comes with the first gray light that steals into my chamber, at which the phantoms vanish, and the mocking faces cease their gibes. A bird that loves the tree beneath my window, presently begins to sing—rain of melody upon my parched-up soul. Then at the open window do I sit for hours, quite happy. The morning winds are ever blithe and joyous ; out from the purple light they come that crowns this very hill. The pine-groves beckon them towards me ; the cornfield, with ten thousand tossing ears, motions them on ; and on they drive in music, and shed by my hair, and calm my throbbing pulse, and cool my fevered brain. Then mine eyes, looking on the dewy fields, themselves have dew in them—a something loosens at my heart, and then the dew—the sleeping farms, the river's stately flow, the wonder and the glory of the earth, sink deep into my soul.'

'It cannot be,' said Mildred, scarce knowing that she spoke aloud, 'that such a mind as this has suffered total wreck.'

'Ay, but it hath, it hath,' returned he, earnestly. 'I have only told thee what I suffered as a boy—enough, as I see, for conviction, and yet not too much, as I hope, for loving pity. Let it suffice to say, that with every year the evil spirit has grown within me, and must one day gain the mastery altogether, if thou wilt not cast it out. There is but one physician in all this world with power to heal me, Mildred. Thou art even as the morning dawn to me ; and if thou wilt but smile a little on me, the darkness will presently dissolve, and all will yet be day. I feel, I *know* it. See, I kneel before thee, and entreat thee—brave, kind heart—to give me thy true love ! Men often boast such love is life to them ; but to me, more than life ; and if refused, a thing more bitter far than death awaits me.'

He knelt before her on the silver sand, his fair face gentle and sad as the dewy eve, his thin white hands clasped close as anchorite's, his eyes fixed hungrily on hers. What could she tell him—for the

truth she dared not tell—what answer could she give that neither would deceive him with false hopes, nor smite him where a blow would worse than slay?

'Rupert,' said she, 'you say that I am fair, and therein, as I believe, you tell me truth. A woman loves her loveliness very dearly; and yet I swear to you that I would straightway become misshapen and uncomely as yonder seeming statue, if by so doing I could lift the burden which you speak of from your troubled mind, or help the grievous loss which Time and loving hearts may still, through God's sweet mercy, remedy. You are yet very young. At present, be content with my best sympathy: having confided to me this great grief, let me bear something of it; make me your priest, and I will do my best to shrive you, keeping your secret safe. Beware of evil counsels, and all evil: the Clyffards are not born mad more than other folks, but unbridled vice and wickedness made them what they were. Be good, be temperate, be honest—for by such means it is that men keep sane.'

'And that is all the comfort you can give me now,' said Rupert, sighing and rising from his seat. 'God bless thee, Mildred, for that much. Let us go home. I am far better for this talk: thy very voice, though speaking not the words which I would hear, is soothed as the harp which David played to pacify mad Saul.'

As they moved slowly homeward, and before the glimmer of their torches had quite left the vaulted chamber, Raymond emerged dripping from the subterranean stream.

'What could Rupert have had to tell her,' murmured he, 'that he should follow her to Ribble Cave, and keep me dripping in the dark so long? A man less accustomed to otter-hunting and fishing in mid-stream, would have run the risk of—taking cold.'

CHAPTER XIV.—THE SCENE THROUGH THE SKY-LIGHT.

There are some men, whom one cannot help envying, that will as readily execute a duty as confer a benefit or a pleasure; who feel no embarrassment whatever at having to say a disagreeable thing, and whose facility for managing unpleasant matters with a high hand should command itself (and yet somehow fails to do so) to public admiration. There are others, again, who shrink from giving pain to their fellow-creatures, as from a surgical operation on themselves, not necessarily from high, or even benevolent motives, but because their natures are sensitive, delicate, and selfish—who are moral Epicureans. Although Ralph Clyffard was a good man (as good men went in those days), he was one of these. He had a kind heart, and would have wounded nobody's feelings, if he could have helped it; but if somebody must needs be offered the cold shoulder, it was not likely to be that person upon whom his own happiness and comfort principally depended; it was likely to be that person least of all. Expediency and convenience, as well as doting fondness, all combined together to make his wife's will a law unto him, and to cause him to look coldly upon whomsoever she had cast out from her good graces. But, at the same time, he would never knowingly have committed an injustice to please her; and it was very painful to him even to do

what was harsh. Thus, when he invited his second son to sup with him in his own turret-chamber, with the object of telling him that he was not wanted at home, the Master of Clyffe did not look forward to a pleasant evening. His conscience pricked him, and the milk of human kindness flowed forth from the wound towards poor Raymond. Throughout the interview, he was patient in listening to what the young man had to say for himself; and even when that defence took something of the form of accusation of Mrs Clyffard herself, he suffered him to say on.

'I do not deny, son Raymond,' rejoined the old man, pacing the little chamber to and fro with his hands behind him, 'that you have something to complain of. Your stepmother has, I fear, been somewhat imperious; while you, Ray, on the other hand, are not of a conciliatory disposition. There are troubles enough threatening this house without the continuance of this unnatural dissension—I cannot bear it. I have come to the conclusion that, for the present at least, it will be better that you should absent yourself: travel is an excellent thing for a young man of your age; spend, therefore, the next few months or a year abroad. When you were quite a lad, you used to be very ambitious of military honours—what say you to a commission in his majesty's Foot Guards? Money, my dear Ray, you may be sure, will never be a subject upon which we shall disagree. At my death, you will at once succeed to your mother's little portion, and thrice as much again. I have not forgotten you in my will, Ray; and in the meantime—I wish you to want for nothing—here are notes to a considerable amount'—

'What! father; am I to leave Clyffe at once? Even a servant is not thus turned out of doors without warning!'

'Nay, lad; I meant not that: a week hence, nay, a month, if you will have it so; there shall be no haste, no harshness. There are arrangements to be made, of course, friends to be written to, interest to be made.'

Raymond looked at his father with a sad and pitying smile; he was not angry, though deeply grieved; he well knew that the old man was mentally contending, not with him, but with another not then present.

Ralph mistook his glance. 'Is the money not enough, good lad? Then let me double it. Heaven knows, I have grudged thee nothing.'

'Nothing but your love, father,' returned the young man reproachfully; 'and now you have it not to give me. I trust that she who has won it all away from me, may not requite you ill for so much good-fortune.'

'Raymond, you do me wrong; I love you, boy: how should I not have love for my own son?'

'Ay, how should you not?' returned the young man bitterly. 'The babe you danced upon your knee so often—your black birdie? The child you took before you upon your pommel for many a breezy ride? The boy whose light-hearted laugh, you said, was the only music you cared to listen to? How should you not, indeed? And yet you have forgotten all these things!'

'No, Ray, no—I have not forgotten them,' answered the old man hurriedly, patting the stripling's head with his great hand. 'You are still very dear to me; you are indeed. Dear Ray—dear Ray! Never weep, lad; that is not like a Clyffard.'

'Who has seen me weep, save thee?' returned the young man passionately. 'But I have a heart, which some have not, believe me, who can weep when they please.'

Ralph Clyffard knit his brows. 'Hush!' said he; 'that is Mildred playing the organ in the gallery, is it not? How grandly it swells forth into the summer night; something divine seems gathering in my soul, yet not without pain.' He placed his hand upon his heart, and sighed, then listened in silence, with his eyes turned to the unshuttered window and the darkling sky.

'Father, since I am to leave you,' continued Raymond earnestly, 'I trust that you will listen to a few last words, which may be the very last that will ever pass between us.'

'They may be indeed,' returned the old man, still gazing on the night. 'The time is drawing near when I shall be but a memory to thee, Raymond; then think upon me as tenderly as thou canst.'

'Say not so, father: you are yet strong and hale; I trust there are many happy years.'

'Happy!' interrupted the Master of Clyffe with quiet scorn: 'how should a Clyffard, having a son, be happy? I speak not of thee, Ray: thy light and wayward nature may be somewhat out of tune with mine, and may vex and anger others; but there is nothing in *thee* to cause the current of a father's blood to freeze.'

'Nor in Rupert either,' answered the young man resolutely, while the organ pealed and thundered; 'although it may be some one's interest to make his father think so. What I would say to you, father, has reference to this very matter, and are words of warning, not of hate, upon mine honour.'

'Being thus pressed, I cannot refuse thee, Raymond: yet remember that it is the last draught which leaves its flavour on the palate, and men who would be praised for their good wine, offer not their friends its lees at parting. My heart is towards thee, Raymond; it is indeed. I pray thee turn it not away just as we are about to separate.'

'That must be light love, father, which is so lightly lost,' returned the young man sorrowfully; 'and though I prize it—being all that I may claim, it seems—yet will I risk its forfeiture. If I tell you lies, I will give you leave to hate me; nay, if I do not prove that I speak truth, then you shall hate me still.'

'Prove what, Raymond?' asked the old man with kindling eyes. 'Trust me, having said so much, though it grows near to midnight, and I need my rest, thou shall say all.'

Above his hoarse deep tones, the organ, 'yearning like a god in pain, was heard tumultuous.'

'I will prove then, father, that the sad story of our race, and of its curse, has been made the handle of deceit and fraud; that the vision which you have seen so often is no illusion indeed, but worse, the cruel trick of a guileful woman; that the White Lady of Clyffe'—(Achieved is the Glorious Work here broke forth jubilant and full, and stormed about their ears in wild acclaim)—'that the haunter of our house is flesh and blood; nay, is the woman whom you have made your wife, to dupe and fool you—Strike, father, if thou wilt, but listen. Nay, then, do but use thine eyes!' Raymond opened a little door in the Turret-chamber, which gained upon the castle leads, and flung it

wide. 'Follow me,' cried he; 'and cast me down upon the stones of yonder courtyard, if I do not prove my words!'

With hasty and uneven steps, his hair streaming in the autumn wind, his bronzed face pale with rage, and expectation of he knew not what, the Master of Clyffe followed close upon his younger son. The moon was small, and hidden at times by the flying clouds; but there was light enough from it and from the stars to shew the vast expanse of roofing, diverse in form as any frozen sea—here level, there ridged; here rising four-square, and there shooting into pinnacles and gables. The various periods of the stately place were pictured there to the antiquarian eye in horizontal section; not a ray from within was to be seen save in one spot, to which they were rapidly drawing near; this shone through a sequestered sky-light, set in the right angle, formed by the junction of two towers. Three hideous gargoyles leaned from their stone bases, as though to peep down at the scene below, and grinned approval.

'One moment, father,' cried Raymond, laying his hand upon his arm: 'I have staked all on this, and must go through with it; but it is for your sake I have done it, as much, ay, more than for my own. You have a right to look there; but though she was Jezebel herself, I would not play the spy without her husband's leave. That is Mrs Clyffard's private chamber, sir.'

'She is not up,' returned the old man hoarsely; 'she bade me "good-night" ere you joined me at the supper-table.'

'She is up, father: that is her light, burning as bright and purely as though it were an altar-candle in the chapel yonder. She is dressing for her part to-night. Look! look!'

For an instant the Master of Clyffe leaned heavily upon the shoulder of his son; then with a great effort he strode forward rapidly, but firmly, and gazed down through the sky-light upon what was passing in the room beneath. For a few moments there he stood, unmoving, with eyes that devoured the scene; then over his face a shadow fell, as falls on him who, at the grave's mouth, looks his very last upon the wife he loves; and uttering one great cry of anguish, he pressed his hand against his broken heart, and fell backward.

Raymond sprang toward him, and, as he did so, could not but see that which had so moved his father. In a small room, and windowless save for the sky-light which had betrayed her, stood Mrs Clyffard, with her eyes cast upward in terror and dismay; they had met her husband's downward gaze at the very moment when she, in the quaint black robe in which she was wont to play her guileful part, and with her back-hair loose, and fallen to her waist, was practising her rôle before the tire-glass. The shroud was in one hand, and needle and thread in the other, while her face wore a look of triumphant malice, which would have unmasked the foul fiend himself, though clad in angelic garments. One instant, she stared upward as though spell-bound, and then quenched the light.

Mrs Clyffard had not seen her husband fall; but there were some precious minutes before her yet, she knew. Swiftly she entered the next chamber, which was her own, and seizing a large jewel-case from the dressing-table, emptied its

glittering contents into her pocket: from a small locked drawer in the same table she took a leather purse, filled tightly with bank-notes. ‘I did not dream, when I began this hoard,’ she muttered, ‘that the day whereon to use it was so near, or it would have been thrice as large.’ Had the day really come? Was the game quite lost? She paused upon the threshold of her chamber, and worried her own fair lips with her sharp teeth. Yes; utterly lost. The expression of her husband’s face had been unmistakable—faith shattered, love misplaced, unutterable pain and woe, had been all pictured there. He had been undeceived with a vengeance. That other form, too, she had seen was Raymond’s—her sworn enemy; it was to him, doubtless, that she was indebted for this evil turn. She had been baffled, beaten by that hateful boy. That was the bitterest draught in all the cup. How came he wandering on the leads at midnight in that fashion? So doubtless, however, it had happened, and seeing what he saw, he had brought his father to look likewise. Curse the cunning boy! And yet, was she not herself to blame, running the risk she did, however small, of such unmitigable ruin. Why had she not put up a blind? Why use a light at all? Could Mildred have betrayed her? Her fair face blackened at the thought. No, she dared not have done it. Her trembling fingers, had she been privy to the scheme, could never have beaten out those organ thunders, which even now were swelling through the house. She was still playing, and therefore her aunt could not make exit, as she had meant to do, through the great gallery. She opened another door, and went out thence. She did not wish to meet a human being; she would leave Clyffe and all it held, and begin life again elsewhere. She was fair as ever, and not poor, as she had been at first—but, alas! here was Rupert coming, and at speed, in the narrow passage; there could be no avoidance of him. ‘Make haste!’ cried he—‘quick—quick!’ He spoke impatiently, and seemed scarce to know to whom he was speaking; or perhaps he already knew all, and addressed her thus imperiously, as one upon whom courtesy and all fair-dealing would be thrown away. ‘Quick, I say; my father is ill—is dying; bring a—’ Running towards her in hot haste, and calling thus, both speech and motion seemed to fail him all upon a sudden: with mouth agape with terror, and eyes starting from their sockets, he stood dumb; then, shrinking from before her with fear and loathing, as from some terrible and unclean thing, he turned and fled.

For a moment, Grace Clyffard watched him with irresolute eyes. ‘I forgot my strange attire,’ she murmured: ‘the fool takes me for the Fair Lady; he thinks I am the harbinger of death. How were it if I really be so?’ ‘My father is dying,’ said he. Perhaps his heart has killed him, as he always thought it would. If so, all may yet be well. My word is as good as Raymond’s. Who will believe an idle tale like this, vouched for but by a dead man and a boy? I will put by this masquerading gear, and play my own part of a tender wife once more. If I have the smoothing of Ralph Clyffard’s pillow, another dawn shall never trouble his vexed soul again.’

Hastily, she put away her black garment in a safe and secret place, and attired herself in the dress she had worn that evening; then, stepping forth into the now vacant gallery, took the

way that led to the chamber where her husband had supped, and whence the sound of many voices and the tramp of many feet could now be heard.

THE RAVEN.

If feathered bipeds were as susceptible to the shafts of slander as unfeathered bipeds are, the raven would be the most miserable of birds. In all ages he has been set down as the prophet of evil. He is credited with having warned Alexander the Great of the approach of a mightier conqueror than himself; and Pliny declares that, unlike many seers, he actually comprehends his own auguries. Poets, ancient and modern, universally endorse the evil reputation of the uncanny-looking bird. Shakspeare avers the raven croaked upon the chimney-top when crook-backed Richard was born. Othello says:

Oh, it comes o'er my memory,
As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
Boding to all;

and Cassius despairs of victory at Philippi because

Ravens, crows, and kites
Fly o'er our heads, and downward look on us,
As we were sickly prey. Their shadows seem
A canopy most fatal, under which
Our army lies ready to give up the ghost.

In Denmark, the mere appearance of a raven in a village is looked upon as a certain sign of the death of the parish priest. The sickness that thinned the numbers of the first colonists of the Bermudas was heralded by the appearance of a multitude of ravens, ‘which continued amongst them till the mortality ceased, when they disappeared, to be seen no more.’ The Bermudans might be excused if they fell in with the general superstition, and henceforth believed

The sad presaging raven tolls
The sick man’s passport in his hollow beak,
And in the shadow of the silent night,
Doth shake contagion from her sooty wing.

And yet it was the raven that carried comfortable tidings to the ark. Nor was it a bird of ill omen to the Swedish navigator on his compassless voyage in the northern seas. The stout-hearted Floke took three ravens with him: the first he set free soon after his departure, and it returned to Ferro; the second, like Noah’s dove, found no rest for the sole of its foot, and came back to the ship; the third held its flight boldly onwards, and Floke following its course, discovered Iceland, and gave it the name it bears.

‘Young ravens must have food,’ says Pistol; but old ravens are popularly supposed to hold a very different opinion, leaving their offspring to cater for themselves as best they may; and Icelanders aver that if a young bird has the ill-luck to tumble out of his nest, his exasperated parents kill and eat him for his awkwardness. Some charitable-minded writers attribute the unnatural behaviour of the ravens to a species of purblind philanthropy which renders them oblivious of the truth, that charity should commence at home, and induces them to

Foster forlorn children,
The whilst their own birds famish in their nests.

The Jewish rabbins, commentating on the expression of God feeding the young ravens, say that the raven is cruel towards its young, but God in pity provides them with flies ; explaining the unpaternal conduct of the bird after a fashion of their own, more commendable for ingenuity than truth. They declare that the raven is born white, and is hated in consequence by its parents, whose feelings gradually change from hate into love, as the plumage of their olive branches becomes more congenial to their taste. This dislike of snowy feathers is easily accounted for, when we remember that the raven was originally silvery white, and that the dusky hue of the race is the inheritance bequeathed to it by a tattling ancestor, who was thus punished for betraying the secrets of Coronis to Phœbus, as in later times the crow was punished for guiding the pursuers of Mohammed to that prophet's retreat. Scandinavian bards tell us that Odin turns the communicative disposition of the raven to good account ; despatching Hugin and Munin at the dawn of day from their station on his shoulders, to which they return at eve, to whisper by turns all they have seen and heard in their rapid flight over the earth, and so keep the god well posted in the doings of the nether-world.

In reality, the raven's conduct as husband and father is irreproachable. Once he has chosen a mate, he cleaves only to her, and unlike other birds, does not seek a new spouse every season. While the process of incubation is going on, he is most assiduous towards his partner, not only supplying all her wants, but even taking her place occasionally, when she tires of her task. Nor have the young birds any cause to complain : as long as they are unable to help themselves, there is no lack of tender care on the part of the parents ; but when this brood is thought old enough to pick up a living by their own exertions, they are made to understand as much, and driven away by the old birds from their own particular haunts. Although the colonising spirit is thus developed in the corvine race, it is co-existent with strong home love. When the raven has found a haven suited to his mind, nothing short of necessity will induce him to forsake it, and should a raven's nest become tenantless from some untimely accident, it is sure to be taken possession of by another couple. In 1843, a pair of ravens took up their residence in a clump of old beeches in Petworth Park, removing the year afterwards to an adjacent cluster of firs. Here they reared a family, taking to the open country for a short time during the summer months, seemingly for the purpose of teaching the young ones the art of flying ; for as soon as they were capable of shifting for themselves, the old birds returned to the firs, and remained at home till winter took them to the sea-coast. For some years, the dusky pair pursued the even tenor of their way, till a bird-nesting urchin stole their young birds. Luckily, the agitation of the parents had attracted the attention of Mr Knox, the Sussex naturalist, who with some difficulty traced the thief out, and found the young birds—almost dead from starvation—in his possession. The strongest of the brood were returned to the deserted nest ; and the very next evening, Mr Knox found the parent birds had returned ; and many a brood they reared afterwards in the same place. In the spring of 1849, just when the female had commenced sitting, a violent storm drove her from the nest, and scattered her eggs on the ground. After a few

days' consideration, the ravens constructed a new nest in a neighbouring tree ; but their labour was thrown away, for a second storm destroyed its results. In disgust, the birds retired from the scene, but after a short absence, returned ; one began to build a new nest, while the other tried its skill at repairing the old one. This difference of opinion was awkward, but, like sensible married folks, they met each other half-way, and compromised matters by removing altogether to another park, where they may be living now, for aught we know. A raven is not often despoiled, as the Petworth birds were ; he has a happy knack of choosing a position for his nest pretty safe from attack ; and although he contents himself with croaking out a protest, when human robbers assail his homestead, he will defend it to the last against birds of any feather, not hesitating in such a sacred cause to engage the vulture or the eagle.

Our subject is a bold bird when occasion requires, but his boldness is tempered with prudence. He will venture comparatively close to a shepherd and his dogs, but gives the widest of berths to any one carrying a gun. Mr Thompson tells a good story illustrative of the combination of prudence and courage in the raven's composition. It was a common practice, in a spacious yard in Belfast, to lay trains of corn to attract the sparrows within view of a window, opened just far enough to afford room for the muzzle of a gun, neither the weapon nor its wielder being visible from without. A tame raven, kept in the yard, used to scamper away at the sight of a man taking the gun towards the house, and hide himself somewhere within view of the scene of slaughter. As soon as a shot was fired, he would dash from his shelter, seize a defunct sparrow, scurry back to his nook with his prize, and repeat the performance as long as the batteau lasted.

The raven can accommodate itself to all varieties of climate. It frequents the wooded mountains and sheltered valleys of the Alpine countries of Central Europe, and is found in Egypt, India, and Japan. His sepulchral voice is heard at Hudson's Bay at all times and seasons ; he follows the hunter over the Rocky Mountains and along the banks of the Columbia ; and takes intense interest in the salmon-fishery. The cold climate of Iceland and Greenland does not deter him from making himself comfortable ; he can do that in the remotest islands of the polar seas. England, Scotland, and Ireland are all favoured with his presence, but he specially affects the Orkneys and Hebrides. The people of Pabbay were once at their wits' end to get rid of the ravens, who mustered in unusual force to feast on the carcasses of some grampus : the islanders were afraid that, the grampus disposed of, the birds would pay their attentions to the fields of barley ; but drove them away they could not. At last, one Morrison hit upon a plan. Stealing with some companions to the sleeping-place of the ravens at night, he contrived to secure a few of them alive ; these were quickly denuded of all their feathers except those on their wings and tail, and turned among their friends in the morning just as they were going to breakfast. The sensation created was immense, and the hubbub fearful, but it ended in the unwelcome guests departing with more haste than ceremony.

The raven is not at all dainty with respect to his eating. Fish, flesh, and fowl, fresh meat or carrion, he has stomach for them all. Mr Macgillivray, who had every opportunity for studying the habits

of the race in the Hebrides, says they may be seen singly or in pairs along the rocky shores, on the hillsides and the mountain-tops, flying slowly and silently at a moderate height. When bird desries a dead sheep, it alights on the nearest eminence, folds its wings, looks around cautiously, and croaks. Then advancing nearer, it surveys its prey for a while, then leaping upon it, examines it in a half-crouching attitude. Satisfied with appearances, the raven gives a croak of delight, picks out an eye, devours the tongue, and then sets to work on the sub-caudal region. By this time, another bird has usually come to share the feast. They perforate the abdomen, drag out and swallow the intestines, and continue to feed until sated, when they retire till digestion has done its part, and hunger impels them to another visit.

Holinshed says the English raven learned to rob the hen-roosts from observing the tactics of the kite and bustard; and continues: 'So much are our ravens given to this kind of spoils, that some idle and curious heads of set purpose have manned, reclaimed, and used them instead of hawks.'

The raven possesses the power of imitating the human voice, and if not so voluble as the parrot, enunciates his sentences with tenfold the gravity of Poll. A raven's corpse was once followed by a greater crowd than ever escorted the funeral of any one of Rome's distinguished sons. This honoured bird was born on the top of the Temple of Castor, but took up his abode in a shoemaker's shop opposite. Crispin took great pains in educating his black lodger, and his pains were well bestowed. Every morning the raven used to fly to the Rostra, and salute in turn Tiberius and his nephews, and having thus testified his loyalty, amused himself with exchanging greetings with the populace. For several years, the bird continued to delight the idlers of Rome, until a jealous brother of his landlord's craft killed him in a fit of anger. The mob rose as one man, drove the murderer out of the city, and then executed him. The body of the popular bird was then placed on a litter, and borne to the pile amid the laments of Rome, and his ashes deposited in a field on the right-hand side of the Appian Way. Most of our readers will remember crazy Barnaby's friend and companion, Grip, ever insisting on his diabolical origin; but few perhaps are aware that the novelist drew Grip from the life, the idiot's pet being compounded of two great originals, of which Mr Dickens was once the happy owner. The first of these came to an early end after banqueting upon a pound or two of white paint; the second and more gifted bird is so happily drawn by its master's hand, that we must give his description entire: 'The first act of this sage was to administer to the effects of his predecessor, by disinterring all the cheese and half-pence he had buried in the garden—a work of immense labour and research, to which he devoted all the energies of his mind. When he had achieved this task, he applied himself to the acquisition of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept, that he would perch outside my window, and drive imaginary horses with great skill all day. Perhaps even I never saw him at his best, for his former master sent his duty with him, "and if I wished the bird to come out very strong, would I be so good as to shew him a drunken man?" which I never did, having, unfortunately, none but sober people at hand. But I could hardly have respected him more, whatever the stimulatory

influences of this sight might have been. Once I met him, unexpectedly, about half a mile off, walking down the middle of the public street, attended by a pretty large crowd, and spontaneously exhibiting the whole of his accomplishments. His gravity under those trying circumstances I never can forget, nor the extraordinary gallantry with which, refusing to be brought home, he defended himself behind a pump until overpowered by numbers. It may have been that he was too bright a genius to live long, or it may have been that he took some pernicious substance into his bill, and thence into his maw, which is not impossible, seeing that he newly pointed the greater part of the garden-wall by digging out the mortar, broke countless squares of glass by scraping away the putty all round the frames, and tore up and swallowed, in splinters, the greater part of a wooden staircase of six steps and a landing. But after some three years, he, too, was taken ill, and died before the kitchen fire. He kept his eye to the last upon the meat as it roasted, and suddenly turned over on his back with a sepulchral cry of "Cuckoo!"'

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF LONDON LIFE.

A NOMINATION.

LONDON, at this present writing,* is no longer a sombre city. From eastern Tottenham to western Turnham Green, there is no such thing as a dead wall. There is almost no such thing as a blank space. If the bill-posters could only devise a scheme for placarding the sky with *Vote for Smith*, they would do it. As it is, Amphion-like, he has compelled, with his sweet piping (or by means of some other piper whom he has had to pay), the very milestones to declare his eligibility to sit in parliament; nay, he has set every tree in Westminster (and especially the juniper-tree) dancing to his (Conservative) measures; and made the very lamp-posts vocal, or, at all events, instrumental to his cause. Nor is it Smith alone who has made all things metropolitan so gay and lively. There are half a hundred other candidates who have decked our public walls and hired our public steeds, and proclaimed that to the vacant seat 'tis he alone succeeds. Their individual confidence, considering that there is a contest, is something sublime; and they express it in the largest type, and in all the colours of the rainbow. One can scarcely procure a cab that does not present the appearance of a car of victory, gorgeous as a slashed doublet with scarlet and yellow and blue, and audacious with printed puffery, as though there were no such proverb as *litera scripta manet*—'your placard remains, though the election has gone against you.' However, a modest man, like myself, has this set-off, that he can go from one end of London to the other without paying for his vehicle, by merely whispering 'Mr So-and-so's committee-room,' taking care to use the name of the gentleman in whose parliamentary service the cab has been (very obviously) engaged.

To one, indeed, who is not himself a candidate, a contested election in his own borough is in some respects advantageous, quite independent of any hard cash which he may reconcile it with his conscience to pocket in exchange for his vote. I am called upon, for instance, as an

inhabitant of Westminster, by the Hon. Captain Grosvenor, who is pleasant and affable enough, and very much more so when I tell him that I am a Liberal; also by certain partisans of Mr John Stuart Mill, the philosopher, whom, I confess, I should like to have tackled personally upon his views about population—for although I have considerably over the quantity of children permitted by his principles, I don't consider myself an abandoned character on that account; moreover, he would allow our wives the exercise of the franchise, whereas it is my opinion that they have quite sufficient influence in the house already; but his partisans, in the philosopher's absence, explain everything to my complete satisfaction, and depart with the promise of my unconditional support. Finally, comes Mr W. H. Smith, a very agreeable canvasser indeed, and we, too, part with genuine expressions of the most cordial good-will, for I have explained to him that, although a Liberal, I will not do violence to my feelings by voting against him.

The simple fact is, although none of them knew it, that I have not taken the trouble to get myself registered, and have therefore no vote to give! Under these circumstances, I have surely a right to consider myself totally unprejudiced, and to take to the hustings in Covent Garden, upon the nomination-day, whichever candidate's cab happens to come first, as his supporter and well-wisher. And this I accordingly do. As I pass rapidly along, the placarded walls make me almost giddy with colour; they give me, so to speak, 'the chromatics.' Now all is blue with me, now yellow, now pink. For a few moments a fashionable hearse, with eight mourning-coaches, which, wonderful to say, the bill-posters have not taken advantage of, relieve my eyes, but immediately afterwards there come two omnibuses, each like a sunset in the tropics. *Lord Fermoy, for Marylebone*, in the colours of his native Erin; the 'tried member,' Mr Harvey Lewis, in crimson; the 'resident candidate,' Mr T. Chambers, in mauve. The bus proprietors are above consideration of party, and let their space to all advertisers, no matter what their — Yes, there goes Baron Rothschild in white and scarlet, and atop of a Citizen.* Nay, the very water-carts demand (with tears) my vote and interest.

At last I reach Covent Garden, where very little business, except electioneering, I should think, to judge by the enormous crowd, can be done to-day; even pine-apple is sacrificed to politicks, and, so far as purchasers are concerned, the claims of shaddock to being the *Forbidden Fruit* are uncontested. A single exception is made in favour of cherries, with half a pound of which, everybody who had threepence in his pocket (and such capitalists are not numerous), seems to have provided himself. Being (by comparison) a person of property, I buy a whole pound of bigarons, intending to reserve what I cannot eat as a present to my wife and family. By tremendous efforts, I manage to make my way through the press to one of the iron posts immediately in front of the hustings, but the stone step on which it stands is already in possession of four persons, and four more are holding on to these. It is a desirable coign of vantage, not only from the extra three inches of height it confers upon one's

stature, but because it defends one from the 'rushes' to which the Great Unwashed are so addicted in times of pressure. Now, to attain the post itself is as difficult as to be returned for Westminster; but by the exercise of great discretion, assisted by a naturally agreeable address, I manage to get on sufficiently good terms with one of the hangers-on to permit me to offer him a shilling without offence; in return for this, he vacates, in my favour, his—well, his semi-foothold, and the privilege he has hitherto enjoyed of clinging with both hands to an individual connected with the manufacture of gas. Yes; if his *métier*, or *metre*, as I have heard it pronounced, was not gasfitting, then was his appearance, and still more the atmosphere that surrounded him as with a halo, deceptive in the extreme. From constant application to his profession, he seemed to have become himself Gaseous—gas oozed so from every pore. I am doubtful whether it did not circulate in his veins like blood, and I positively trembled whenever a pipe was lit in our neighbourhood, lest a spark should fall upon this gentleman, and make one great jet of him, and therefore of me.

At first, all the gas in his body seemed to revolt at my succession to the place of one who seemed to have been his friend; but taking care to hold him firmly by the throat with one hand, I offered him about a hundred cherries with the other, and straightway he was appeased, and spoke me fair. 'Don't you mind throttling of me,' said he; 'and don't you put your nice gloves on to that there post, for it's black-greased.' The good man warned me with reason, for the police, or somebody, had, with refined malignity, anointed—above a certain height—every pillar with engine-grease, to prevent the people swarming up them. But they swarmed everywhere else. Elevated as I now was, I could mark the sea of upturned faces paving both street and market, and watch, in comparative safety, the great human waves—the 'rollers' of the roughs—come rushing in upon the hustings, there to be broken and repelled by a strong breakwater of police. There were women, with children in arms, amid this dangerous turmoil—women to whom, I should think, Mr Mill himself would deny the possession of deliberative wisdom—as well as several poor cripples, who had certainly no need of their crutches there, and even one or two blind men come 'to see the fun.' Beside the 'rushes' with which the rabble recreated themselves while waiting for the candidates of their choice, infinite amusement was created by the throwing about of market-produce, such as cabbages and green stuff. An enormous packet of mint, I thus gratuitously received, was of infinite service, for, stuck between me and my new friend, it afforded me olfactory refreshment under circumstances of the greatest exigency.

With the conversation of those immediately about me I was more astonished than edified. The general opinion seemed to be that it was Mr E. T. Smith—so familiar to the public in connection with the 'Adorable Menken'—who was soliciting the suffrages of Westminster; and that the name of the philosopher, his opponent, was Mr Mills. A few were even so misguided as to imagine that 'Scott, Champion Bill-poster,' so conspicuously placarded over the hustings, referred to some fourth aspirant for senatorial honours, whose address had not yet been issued. There

* A placard, and not the Baron himself—a Citizen omnibus, not a free and independent elector—are here spoken of.

were enough of the better-informed, however, to carry on a brisk controversy upon all these topics. I will not repeat the private scandals—for the most part monstrous and improbable enough—that were retailed concerning the rival candidates; but it struck me, as I listened with hair on end, that, with the exception of being placed in the witness-box, and cross-examined by counsel, no situation could be more trying, to any gentleman conscious of having committed a peccadillo, than that of standing for a constituency. Nor were these scandals told only behind their backs. No sooner did the Three for whom we waited take up their position with their friends at that bar of public opinion, the hustings, than the *vox populi* began its accusations. The Man of Fashion, the Philosopher, and the Man of Business (who, by the by, is also a thorough gentleman) were each greeted in turn with a piece of the popular mind. Not that they were at first individually recognised. On the contrary, the high-bailiff was for some time the man whom the mob was resolutely determined should know what they thought of him. Then the proposers and the seconds were mixed up with their principals, and the principals with one another; so that Mr John Stuart Mill was confidently pointed out to me as a young gentleman of fashion just come of age, and Captain Grosvenor as the great political thinker of the age.

Unquestionably, the two Liberal candidates had least fair-play shewn to them. The mob would listen to no word from either. Captain Grosvenor 'stuck to them,' as my gasman observed (and I was quite in a position to appreciate the force of the expression), for more than half an hour, but only a select circle of reporters immediately beneath him could catch one syllable. Then came the turn of John Stuart Mill. It was the strangest sight to see that calm and philosophic face regarding the tossing throng. There was not a trace of contempt or even annoyance in his features, but certainly I never saw a man more out of place in a nomination-booth. The sense of humour is wanting in that deep-thinking and powerful mind, or else he was pained at the indecorous behaviour of those to whom, without exception, he is ready to intrust the right of franchise. For my own part, who am not a philosopher, I make my mind up, as I listen in vain for his words of wisdom, never to go through such an ordeal, however 'solicited' by committees, while unpaid parliaments exist; nay, think I, not for a peerage—unless there is a pension added—would I ask for such sweet voices as these. I feel like Caius of Corioli as I clasp my mint nearer to my nose.

Mr W. H. Smith has a little better fortune with these gentry. The Liberals are not so numerous as their rivals, and have to invent a new kind of groan—a prolonged low bellow, such as we hear in the Zoological Gardens at feeding-time—in order to make up for their inferiority in volume of sound. In intervals of this agreeable monotone, two or three words of the Conservative candidate crop up, like hyphens. Altogether, I am not impressed with the desirability of Nominations; I almost think it a pity that they can't be made private—as it is proposed to do with executions. But then I have not yet seen the show of hands. This is really very interesting, and above all, it brings with it a divine silence. For a few moments, I cease to wish that I had wool in my ears—an indispensable precaution, by the by, for every

candidate. There is a winnowing of the air, too, produced by the waving of ten thousand human hands, of a hundred thousand fingers and thumbs. True to my promise of impartiality, and, moreover, actuated by the knowledge that if I let go of my gasman, I shall be instantly trampled upon, I do not hold up my own hand. But I examine the hands that are held up with all the interest of a Beamish. If I were that great chiromaniac, I could doubtless tell by the 'phalanges' of their thumbs whether the present company are Liberals or Conservatives; but lacking his peculiar power, and not having heard the name given forth from the hustings, I know not in whose interest is this display of digits. Neither does my gasman know, although he has one hand up, and greatly desires to hold up the other, and would (as he assures me, to my great alarm), 'if it wasn't for fallin' ed over tip atop of a gent like me.' I give him the rest of my cherries, and adjure him to withstand all temptation of that nature; then once more I gaze around.

Short hands, long hands, thin hands, strong hands, taper but tawny ones, hairy and brawny ones, most of them dirty ones, very few 'shirty' ones, clothed in cotton or kid, or in thumb-stalls half hid, and a few even set off by jewel or ring—that grove of Palms was a most curious thing! It was an exercise, too, that pleased, for my neighbour was not the only one who added his mite to the three great manual exhibitions; and how the Returning Officer, with the best intentions in the world, could make allowance for the fact, that some held two hands up, and some only one, is between himself and his conscience. The show of hands is of little consequence now, but at no very distant day it may become very important, and foreshadow the result of all elections, since each of those hands will hold a vote. Then, indeed, shall predictions be made by palmistry, and may Heaven avert all evil omens! It is something to say, however, that in all that stormy meeting no hand was clenched in anger, but all was good-humour from first to last: a very different scene from that when Castlereagh's candidate for Westminster stood on the same hustings, and was pelted with bricks and stones.

A goodly number of ladies smiled approval upon the scene from the neighbouring houses, and a bevy of three or four of them had the curious inscription of *Plump for Smith* stuck all round their window. They were plump undoubtedly; but the statement that they were all for Smith, struck this Home Correspondent as being (to say the least of it) invidious, and disappointing to the general public.

THE HARVEST MOON.

The moon has turned to a silvery gold;
The corn is swaying around the fold;
The lark is asleep by the plough at rest;
Day is hushed to the black Night's breast.

Thatched like huts, stand the slanting sheaves,
On the broad field strewn with the poppy leaves;
And the red clouds hang, with a wandering love,
The wood and the meadow and stream above.